SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

Saron's Mission: ***Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!***

Reverend James E. Smith, Pastor
Cell: 269-816-3870
Email: pastorjames@saronlutheran.org

Amanda Bradley, Communications Director
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll.marcus17@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Mackenzie Dressander, Nursery Director
Email: mackenzie.trail99@gmail.com

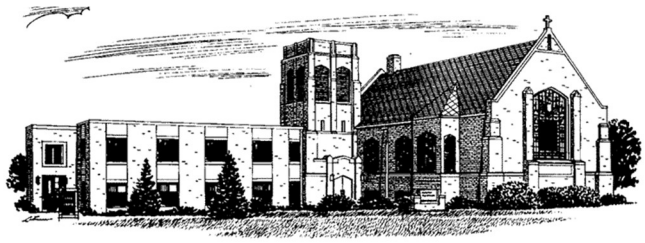
Typical Sunday at Saron:

Fall, Winter and Spring **(through May 17, 2026):**
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am-10:30am Adult Bible Study
10am-10:45am Learning Hour for Ages 3-8th Grade
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer Schedule (**begins May 24, 2026**):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Yehiel Curry,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop of the
North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia



Pastor's Update

The afternoon of March 6th for our family began in a festive mood. My birthday was the next day, and our friend Pastor Chris Laughlin was with us to celebrate. It was unusually warm. After we picked up the kids from school, we heard sirens. 3:45 seemed like a weird time for a test, so, out of an abundance of caution, we all went down to the basement for a half-hour. We lost power for maybe two minutes. We came back up, and the sun was shining. "Well, that was a nothingburger of a tornado."

I learned how wrong I was when I started getting texts from everywhere asking how we were doing. I went online and saw pictures being posted of the F2 tornado that had struck only a mile and a half away.

Having visited in-person since, it is hard for me to put into words how awful this was for the town. Half of the city looks like a lumberyard. At my boys' Catholic school, they haven't been able to have mass for two weeks in the church, and the building for the gym is totaled. Tragically, so many have lost homes, often those least able to afford to rebuild.

Yet I know that somehow God is working. I see it in all the people who have checked in on each other (thanks to the many of you who have cared about us), the relief agencies who were here immediately (American Red Cross and Samaritan's Purse come to mind), the churches who have gotten involved, and the first responders streaming in from all over the region.

There is so much more to our community and our country than our arguments and divisions. It is a shame to me that it often takes a tragedy to bring out our best selves, our togetherness, our community spirit—our bedrock Christianity. But it is so inspiring to me to see it still there underneath and to see the Holy Spirit still at work. I appreciate your prayers for Three Rivers, and Union City, as well. And I pray that in our own church of Saron and in our own community of St. Joseph, we can also answer the bell and be there for each other both in times of crisis and in ordinary time.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor James E. Smith

General Information

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor James E. Smith
Monday – Thursday
Hours may vary. Appointments are great!
Amanda Bradley (Communications Director):
Mondays & Thursdays 10am-2pm
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Thursday Mornings and by Appointment
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)

If you or your loved one is need of a visit or pastoral care, please contact Pastor James at 269-816-3870.

Specific questions or concerns may be directed to an appropriate council member or committee liaison:
President – Fran Bolson
Vice President – Erik Bergh
Secretary – Isla Helmuth
Treasurer – Jamie Svab
Worship – Marilyn Frey
Learning – Chuck Knebl
Outreach – Claudia Staude & Merrily Smith
Facilities – Erik Bergh & Steve Cook
Youth – Scott Gaspari
Support – Jamie Svab
Hospitality – Merrily Smith

Caring and Sharing

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

4/1 Shadden Gulley
4/1 Susan Harris
4/3 Brian Culverhouse
4/4 Elizabeth Gaspari
4/4 Elise Olson
4/4 Margot Olson
4/5 Brighton Hooper
4/8 Janet Larson
4/9 Scott Kohs
4/9 Kim Perrin
4/11 Alaina Bradley
4/13 Marilyn Lucy
4/14 Lorelei Gorman
4/20 Claudia Staude
4/22 Addison Osgood
4/23 Ava Osgood
4/25 Clementine Brueck
4/26 Michael Breyen
4/27 Linda Pater
4/28 Brooke Henderson

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

4/16 Kathi & Terry Anserello

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

The goal of this new ecumenical movement is to shift the conversation ahead of the midterms toward shared Christian values based on Matthew 25: feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and welcoming the stranger. This group hopes to provide a framework for Christian voters to prioritize these values when they vote and to provide space for elected leaders who share these values to exercise moral courage.

Because the themes of Palm Sunday point so clearly to the differences between God's reign and our earthly Empires, an ecumenical group of faith leaders have chosen **Palm Sunday (March 29)** to make a public statement witnessing to our Christian values in this time of political turmoil in our country. **The Palm Sunday Path leadership in MI is planning a procession to the state capitol in Lansing at 3pm.**

This event is intended to be a public witness to our faith and shared values, *not a protest*. **Clergy are being invited to dress in clerics, robes, and/or stoles**. Everyone is invited to bring palm branches to wave as we walk approximately one mile from a UCC congregation to the capitol building. **Any signs or posters should express positive and unified messages about feeding, healing, and welcoming**.

Contact Pastor Rachel Laughlin (Prince of Peace, Portage) for more details at pastor@popportage.org.

Worship

ASSISTED HEARING DEVICES

Our sound system in the sanctuary came with headphones to assist those having difficulty hearing the worship service. If you are interested, ask Marcus if you can try one out.

SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we have Sensory Bags available for use. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your concerns or thanksgivings via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made online via a link in our Thursday email. You may include as much, or little, detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are invited to be part of this Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. **Flowers are now $40 per vase.** Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then please **return the vase.**

Nursery service is available during worship for children under five years old (exceptions are made, especially for siblings). There is a live-feed monitor in the nursery where you may keep up with the service if you need to stay with your child. For children five and older, there are options to bring into the sanctuary, such as clipboards with coloring pages, sensory bags (see article above) and children's bulletins. If you need to step out with them to regroup, there are quiet activities in a bin next to the sofa in the narthex. We embrace family units in all stages and welcome wiggles & giggles as a part of worship.

We recognize the worship experience for families may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions with Mackenzie Dressander (269/944-7753). Please also contact her if you are willing to volunteer to support this important service.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

April 5: Easter
Jeremiah 31:1-6
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

April 12: 2nd Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:14a, 22-32 25
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

April 19: 3rd Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

April 26: 4th Sunday of Easter
Acts 2:42-47
Psalm 23
1 Peter 2:19-25
John 10:1-10

Youth Group (middle school & high school age) is still trying to work out a schedule for meetings that will work for our busy students/athletes/artists.

Learning

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

The Learning Hour offers the following options:

- 9:40am-10:30am Adult Forum: High School - Adult
- 10am-10:45am Confirmation: Grades 6-8
- 10am-10:45am Sunday School: Preschool - Grade 5
    - New Classroom!
    - New Curriculum!
    - New Friends!

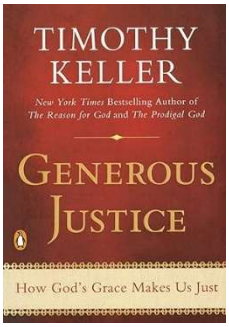
Watch for the announcement of our 2026 VBS theme!

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

We will be wrapping up our extensive study of Acts on April 1 then taking a hiatus before resetting with a new study in May. Watch the weekly emails for more information. This group typically meets on Wednesdays at 9:30am in the upstairs lounge. Contact Pastor James with questions.

TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

Following the Lenten break, we will resume meeting on **April 7.** For the first week, the focus will be on the lessons and Gospel for the following Sunday. Then, on **April 14**, we will begin to read and discuss the book ***Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*** **by Tim Keller**. Ed Staude will lead the book study, which is estimated to run for about nine weeks.

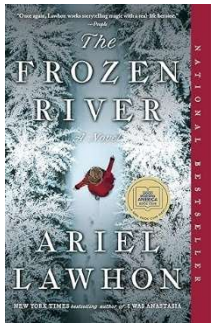

TIMOTHY KELLER
New York Times Bestselling Author of The Reason for God and The Prodigal God
GENEROUS JUSTICE
How God's Grace Makes Us Just

In this book, Keller presents the Bible as a fundamental source for promoting justice and compassion for those in need. He explores a life of justice empowered by an experience of grace: a generous, gracious justice. Generous Justice offers readers a new understanding of modern justice and human rights that will resonate with both the faithful and the skeptical. We believe it will lead to some enlightening discussions. Generous Justice is available from Amazon ($12.44 paperback; $11.99 Kindle) and other internet sellers in a range of prices.

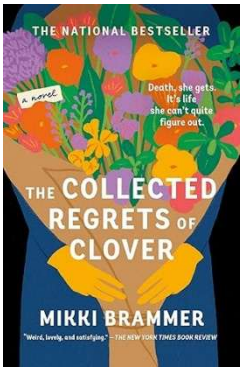
We meet Tuesday evenings at 6pm in the upstairs lounge for one hour, then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. All are welcome!

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Don Hafer (269/985-3637, haferdon@gmail.com)
Ed Staude (636/288-1016, staude.edmund@gmail.com)
Eric Standen (269/759-3556, dande-standen@sbcglobal.net)
Pr. James (269/816-3870, pastorjames@saronlutheran.org)

On April 12 (2nd Sunday) at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge is when we next meet to discuss ***Frozen River*** **by Ariel Lawhon.** This work of fiction was inspired by the life and diary of Martha Ballard, a renowned 18th Century midwife who defied the legal system. She was privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors with women and their health needs. At a time when women were best seen and not heard, this is a tense and tender story about a remarkable woman who left a remarkable legacy.



Then on May 3, we wrap up our season of good reading with ***The Collected Regrets of Clover*** **by Mikki Brammer.** Clover dedicates her life to helping people deal with their approaching death. Amazon review says, "This book turns the taboo subject of death into a reason to celebrate life."


THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER
A novel
Death, she gets. It's life she can't quite figure out.
THE COLLECTED REGRETS OF CLOVER
MIKKI BRAMMER

Join us, bring along your ideas for books you would like to discuss for next season and get ready for a good exchange of ideas. All are welcome at any meeting! Questions? Please contact Kathy Cowall at 269-428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.
-Joseph Addison

We will return from break on the fourth Sunday in April (4/26). Watch the Sunday Bulletin and the weekly eblast for the topic. We typically meet the 2nd & 4th Sundays of the month at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge.

Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions or topic suggestions.

Women of the ELCA

DEBORAH CIRCLE

Deborah Circle will meet on **Wednesday, April 8 at 7pm in the upstairs lounge**. Zoom will be available. A link for that will be emailed close to the meeting date. Denise Cook will lead the study. Study details will be emailed closer to the meeting date.

Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 with any questions.

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship after the service? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for at least 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

NOISY OFFERING

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

We receive a noisy offering (and those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month.
These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Saron is consistently ranked as a top 10 contributor to this effort. Thank you for your continued support!

EYE GLASS COLLECTION

Lions RECYCLE For Sight

Do you have old glasses sitting in a drawer?

The Lions Club has provided a collection box for the narthex. We have several members who are Lions that can deliver our glasses to the club where they will do more good out in our community.

Thank you!

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™
HEART-TO-HEART™

Simple food, honestly sourced and lovingly made creates connections, gives fuel to the fight, and starves ignorance and apathy.
-Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen

On February 26, Deb Standon, Linda Taylor, Fran Bolson, Cindy Brown and Marilyn & Brad Frey assembled and delivered 100 sack lunches to the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen. The lunches included a sandwich, chips, fruit, and cookies provided by Kathi Anserello. The Soup Kitchen has recently purchased & moved to the former Lark's BBQ on Main Street in Benton Harbor, which is still under major renovation.

During the renovation & until further notice, Saron will be assembling sack lunches at the Red Lotus Nutrition and delivering them to the Soup Kitchen to be distributed to the guests. We would like to thank Red Lotus for allowing us to pack the lunches in their commercial kitchen.

Before the move, we were providing 80 lunches & since the move we are assembling up to 150 lunches! Due to the increased need in our community, we need more people to provide cookies. If you are able to help with assembling the lunches or to provide cookies, please use the link in the weekly email or contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:
Lindsay Gaspari:847/373-8826 lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com
Meredith Gacek:269/235-4530 meredithgacek@yahoo.com

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

Contact Pastor James or Merrily Smith at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com for more information on this group.

Support

The Support Committee typically meets the Tuesday before the third Monday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with a brokerage firm to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Ed Brunner at ebrunner54@gmail.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands!

Miscellaneous Bits of News

We have a group that will be joining our Saron family on **April 26.** If you would like to be included, or would like to learn more about Saron and the Lutheran tradition, contact Pastor James at pastorjames@saronlutheran.org as soon as possible.

Linda Pater has again invited the women of Saron to gather at her home on Paw Paw Lake in Coloma on **Saturday, May 2, 9am-3pm** for our annual Women's Retreat. Join us for a day of music, great food and fellowship. Cynthia Caruso, a retired Episcopal priest and a friend of Saron's, will present a special program for us:

"Have you ever walked around in a scene with Jesus, watching him, his followers, his detractors and the scenery...you will be invited into Jesus' life, using your sanctified imagination. Old stories may become fresh with a different perspective. Come spend time in Roman-occupied Palestine where there is an itinerant preacher creating quite a stir. Come and see what the ruckus is about!"

The cost is $15 and includes a delicious breakfast, lunch snacks and a great time at Linda's. Bring a friend! Sign up in the Narthex. Hope you can join us!!!

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
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A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

APRIL 2026 NEWSLETTER

HOLY WEEK

PALM SUNDAY

March 29 8:30am & 11am

EXCITEMENT

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 2 7pm

CONFUSION

GOOD FRIDAY

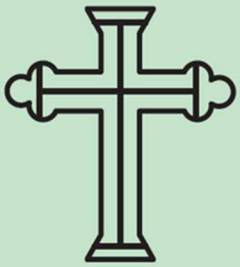
April 3 12:15pm & 7pm

DESPAIR

EASTER VIGIL

April 4 6pm

HOPE



EASTER SUNDAY

April 5 8:30am & 11am

JOY

Our 11am and evening worship services will also be available via Zoom.
There will be an Easter Pancake Breakfast between services with Youth Activities/Egg Hunt beginning around 10:15am.

APRIL 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study	**2** **Maundy Thursday** 7pm Worship	**3** **Good Friday** 12:15pm Worship 7pm Worship	**4** **Easter Vigil** 6pm Worship
5 EASTER SUNDAY 8:30am Worship 9:40am Easter Breakfast 10:15am Youth Activities/Egg Hunt 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**6** 11am Prayer Group	**7** 6pm Bible Study	**8** 9am Helping Hands	**9** No Practices!	**10**	**11**
12 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**13** 11am Prayer Group	**14** 6pm Bible Study 8pm Support Meeting	**15** 9am Helping Hands	**16** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**17**	**18**
19 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**20** 11am Prayer Group 6pm Council Meeting **Newsletter Articles Due**	**21** 6pm Bible Study	**22** 9am Helping Hands	**23** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **Soup Kitchen**	**24**	**25** **Spring Cleanup 9am**
26 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option (New Members Joining!)	**27** 11am Prayer Group	**28** 6pm Bible Study	**29** 9am Helping Hands	**30** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal		